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### Translucent Bodies

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# Translucent Bodies

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## Simone Ferracina

*Colouration is not a consequence of external stimulation, but of internal processes in the organism. The animal changes colour to “express a particular interiority”. The colouration of the skin constitutes a code: the other members of the species decipher the meaning of the message. Cephalopods “speak through the skin”. . . [they become] to other participants of the species a mere informative surface. It is an extremely “opaque”, inter-specific communication process.*

*Vilém Flusser, Vampyroteuthis Infernalis<sup>1</sup>*

The capsules were whitish and slightly see-through. Inside, she could detect a metallic dust of nanobots, faintly moving. She filled a glass with water, placed one capsule on her tongue, and swallowed. The Immersive Vision Interface (IVI) was switched on, and in minutes the show began.

First it was cardiac broadcasts—concentric rays throbbing to the rhythm of her heartbeat. Then temperature readings infused her skin with purple, red and orange tones. Fractal meshes surfaced from her flesh, switched on and off by synaptic messages. Chemical shapes gravitated around her limbs, shrinking and dilating, shaking and dancing. Bacte-

rial fluctuations enveloped her body in a liquid sheet of light.

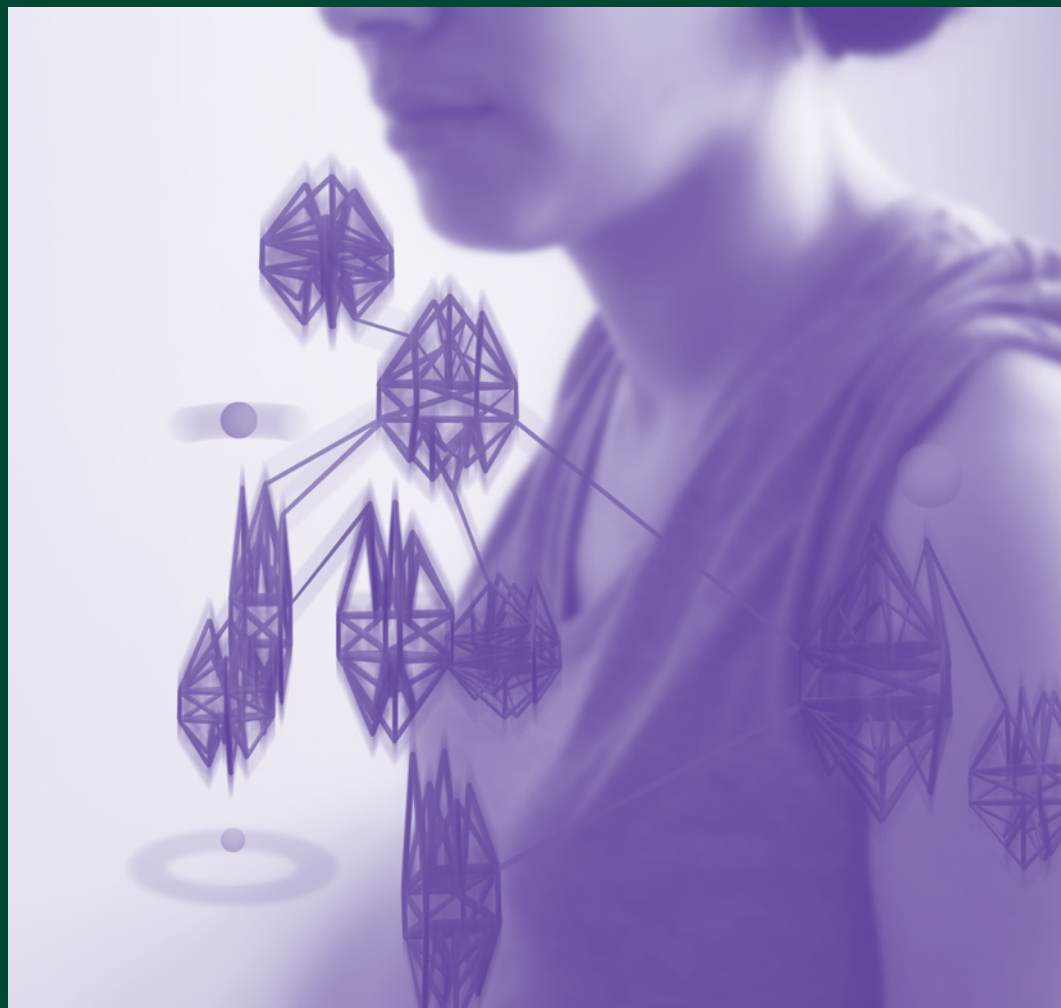
The “Body Hack”—a software originally developed by a twenty-something working in the fashion industry—repurposed diagnostic nanobots to produce real-time visualizations of the human body. It transcoded the interior ecologies and autonomic rhythms of our organism into spontaneous, immersive digital graphics. Although the software became, almost immediately, the most widely adopted digital garment app for optoelectronic channels, it took several weeks for users to discover and embrace it as a new kind of language.



Microbial Glimmers.

### *Intersubjective*

Would her electronic garment signal sadness, anger and frustration? Would color changes and morphological transformations betray an accelerated heart rate or high adrenaline levels? “I’m being hacked, taken over by my own biochemistry,” thought Maya. Yet, she was fascinated by the slippery expressivity of the shapes appearing in her field of view, by their strange pirouettes—and eager to interpret them. After work, she spent most waking hours in front of the mirror observing her innermost feelings being plotted in real-time by algorithms—drawing links between internal emotions and external emergencies. That’s how Maya discovered a communicative dimension between intentionality and metabolism. That’s how she learned this liquid, collaborative and uncanny semantics.



Mood Constellations.

### *Endosubjective*

Observation did not help when it came to monitoring her own health. The body communicated independently from consciousness, extruding grammars of electrical signifiers too complex and opaque for Maya's untrained eye. Her friend Ross had studied the interpretation of what medical doctors now commonly called the "EM" (Exploded—not Electron—Microscope), and had even helped streamline some of the programming code. "Sometimes I wish I didn't know how to read the EM." He would tell her. "Sometimes, I wish I could not see in its drawings the ironic beauty of pain and disease."



Botanic Messaging.



### *Transsubjective*

Maya couldn't forgive herself for clumsily spilling nano-bots in the garden while carrying groceries. "As if maintaining an augmented body weren't expensive enough!" she grumbled. Then, a few days later, an unexpected digital overgrowth appeared in the garden. Pink mosses sprouted in mid-air; metamorphic weeds swayed between the leaves. Maya sat outside, marveling at these technologically mediated extensions. In them, she could recognize—in the bushes, flowers and soil outside of her suburban home—the same chemical and biological languages described by her own body; the same punctuated rhythms, electrical swirls and bacterial networks. Like a soil or a lake, her human body too was an ecology; one supported by delicate symbiotic relations, which extended well beyond the limits of her skin. She remembered Virilio: "Human comes from the word humus. Humus speaks of humility."<sup>2</sup>

- 1 Vilém Flusser, *Vilém Flusser's Brazilian Vampyroteuthis Infernalis*, ed. and trans. Rodrigo Maltez Novaes (New York and Dresden: Antropos Press, 2011), 42.
- 2 Paul Virilio, *Grey Ecology*, trans. Drew Burk, ed. Hubertus von Amelnunxen (New York and Dresden: Antropos Press, 2009), 40.

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